

Letters sent to President Allan Rock, University of Ottawa, cc the Committee for the Defence of Education (CDE), in support of physics professor Denis G. Rancourt, up to January 5, 2009 – sixteen letters.

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From: **Sylvia Smith** <

Date: Jan 5, 2009 8:51 PM

Subject: in support of Denis Rancourt

To: alan.rock

Cc: claudcde

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Dear Dr. Rock,

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I am a mature student and take courses regularly at the University of Ottawa. As well as a teacher in Ottawa Carleton District School Board.

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I am appalled at the decisions the University is making in reference to dealing with Dr. Rancourt. I am an engaged learner in his Cinema Politica events. I also have had numerous discussions with Dr. Rancourt and impressed with his commitment to social, economic, and political justice, something far too many educators distance themselves with, and yet, is what real learning and engagement in the academic process is all about. Dr. Rancourt should be honoured, not pillaried!

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I want to tell you that you will not be doing either the university community, or the community at large a favour by firing Dr. Rancourt. In fact, you will be doing us, collectively, a great harm. He should NOT be fired, period. In fact, I request that the Board of Governors hold a public meeting on the question. This would be real democracy in action. I would also like to have a meeting with you personally, so that this matter can be discussed and you might be able to answer the questions I have concerning Dr. Rancourt.

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As an esteemed academic and politician, and someone who has (I hope) the better health and welfare of all learners and citizens of our community, I request that you listen to the people who are learning, collaborating, and making a difference in our world. Dr. Rancourt is one of those people.

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Sincerely,

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Sylvia Smith

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Sylvia Smith
Teacher,
Elizabeth Wyn Wood Alternate Site

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Coordinator, "Project of Heart"
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From: **Graeme O'Farrell** <

Date: Jan 5, 2009 7:50 PM

Subject: Appeal for Professor Denis Rancourt

To: allan.rock

Cc: claudede

To Allan Rock, dishonourable President of the University of Ottawa

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I am dismayed to hear of the University of Ottawa's plans to fire Denis Rancourt, professor beloved by many and someone I owe a debt of gratitude to. I attended the second running year of Denis Rancourt's popularly known "Activism Class" which pressed the limits of traditional education into new territory for students and community members.

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The novel structure of this class allowed students to design their own curriculum and to learn without pressure or stress under the glaring eye of grades. On a pass/fail system, students needed only to show a true and devoted interest in the course contents and to prove in the final exam that learning, critical thinking and community collaboration had taken place during the student's participation in the course. It also allowed community members such as myself to attend, offering the students contribution from outside the niche of academia and offering the community free education. Furthermore the topics covered were controversial, varied and many, with an overall theme of social justice which inspired much dialog between students and community members alike.

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More valuable than any of the content in the course was the opportunity of those in attendance to organize into workgroups and to collectively pursue assignments and curriculums of their choosing. This practice encouraged consensus building, community organization and a grassroots form of democratic decision making. Many of these workgroups did valuable work, including fighting to uphold the Activism Course and to receive more TA support in spite of the administration's constant reluctance to admit the Activism Course as legitimate.

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It's true that Denis' methods are not traditional and should be examined and tested, not necessarily accepted at face value as the next big thing. The key in the challenge Denis is making to the administration, however, is student freedom and participation. Students must have equal say in how their education system will function, and Denis is giving them the freedom and the right to have their voices heard. I can understand your fear and your reluctance to let Denis continue his work, as it challenges many of the foundations upon which the University rests. But you must understand that to fire Denis and attempt to invalidate this revolution in education will only aggravate the situation your students

are in. They are oppressed.

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So I write to you now to appeal to your better nature. Firing a professor who is challenging the system is an act of cowardice. Acting diplomatically, democratically, transparently and in co-operation with professors, board members AND students is an act of great courage that could completely transform education as we know it in Canada for the better. You could be seen as a leader to turn the tide of administrative oppression in the classroom, rather than just another in a long line of presidents and hard-lining professors who demand that students learn discipline under judgement of their "superiors" and pay homage to a strict system that indoctrinates rather than inspires.

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If you try to stomp on the freedoms of professors and students now, they will only organize again in other ways and carry with them the grudge of being beaten down one too many times. Already several letter writing campaigns and demonstrations have been made in Denis Rancourt's defence, and these sorts of actions will not cease but rather increase as long as the university refuses to change.

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I have chosen not to attend University but instead to educate myself simply because of the structure of most university administrations and classrooms. I know that most University institutions cannot or will not bend enough to accommodate my capacity for learning. Changing the ways of a rigid education system is opening the doors to me and those like me who have the discipline to learn without the imposition of the administration. It would be increasing the opportunity for prosperity in Ottawa and abroad.

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Students are the next generations leaders. Give them the credit they deserve. Your own Vision statement for the university implies that in resisting this movement for greater autonomy in the classroom and freedom for students you are being a hypocrite to your own institution. I ask that you stand by your own Vision statement and open yourself to new forms of teaching, learning and administering education.

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As a beneficiary of companies such as Gold Corp whose human rights record reflects on the reputation of the University, you have every reason to seek out an innovative new form of learning that includes social justice and activism. This would effectively help your reputation and your moral standing in the eyes of prospective students. You may have to turn down a donation from the next human rights abuser that wants a building erected in their name, but this money could in turn be raised by bringing in new students who are most self-sufficient in their learning and who can find new ways of supporting their university ethically.

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To fire Denis Rancourt is a disservice to your administration, the University, the students and the public. He is not a criminal and has done nothing wrong to deserve this treatment. He has only upheld the principles of democracy in a non-democratic institution.

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What other reason do you have to fire this upstanding professor besides fear and an unwillingness to change for the better?

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I ask that you acknowledge receipt of this letter and reply with a valid answer to the above question before January 9th, 2008.

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Do the right thing, don't hold on to the old ways that no longer work. Make a difference where you can and you can make a difference for students all over the world by your example. All that is being asked of you is that you erase a historically oppressive mandate in the structure of education and help to usher in freedom for students and professors in the classrooms.

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Awaiting your reply,
Graeme O'Farrell

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From: **rob Courcy** <
Date: Jan 5, 2009 3:27 PM
Subject: request a public meeting
To: allan.rock
Cc: claudede

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I am a great fan of Mr. Denis Rancourt, what a shame, how can you not encourage this guy 100%.

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So I am sending you Mr. Allen Rock this protest statement against the university's plan to fire Professor Rancourt.
I request that the Board of Governors hold a public meeting on the question and that I meet with you Mr. Allan Rock in person to discuss the matter. Very important that I get some answers.

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Also make sure it's very public because I want to know when this will take place, I have a very limited amount of computer time so; please make sure we all have the change to attend.

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He's a super man and your constantly taking away Denis free right to grow, to prosper and to make change. Change is good, it's away of learning, growing and moving forward.

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I loved that he got the public involved, I also should have the right to learn, to participate, to some free education.

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The world turns around and around, are you part of it or not. Too many good things surrounded by to many great people that are involved can not be stopped. What an example of craziness, What planet are you from?

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Thank you
Robert Courcy

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From: **Isabelle Soucy** <

Date: Jan 5, 2009 2:12 PM

Subject: My gratitude towards the university

To: allan.rock

Dear President Allan Rock,

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I have happily invested four years of my life studying at one of Canada's most renowned universities and I am proud when I say that I have acquired my education from the University of Ottawa. To me, it is an institution that values learning, that encourages research and discoveries, and guides young adults to become autonomous, confident, creative and rational members of our Canadian society. Some people do complain that university is still a difficult environment in which we learn to memorize, cram, and jump through the many hoops required to get the desired paper at the end of it all, but I've always believed that university is what you make of it, and I have made it into an experience that I have no complaints about.

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I have made most of my research projects intrinsically meaningful; I have found aspects of each course with which I could identify, I have studied random courses out of pure interest, and I have tailored my course selection to best promote my academic and personal growth. I am profoundly grateful that the University of Ottawa offers a wide variety of courses, professors and teaching approaches that meet individual needs. I am especially grateful that the university allows enough freedom to the students and the professors, which allowed me to *make* and *fashion* my experience into what it has been.

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And personally, this is why I am grateful that the University staff is composed of so many different personalities with so many diverse views and approaches. I am grateful for those professors that go beyond the necessary and that find ways to motivate the students, encourage creativity, critical thinking, and action. Professors like these wake up the life in all of us that energizes us to reach our potential and surpass our limits. This is what Professor Denis Rancourt and professors like him represent. These are the professors the University NEEDS to keep, to value and to recognize. These are the type of individuals that have allowed me to make my university experience what it has been, that have allowed me to grow into what I have become.

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So I ask you, President Allan Rock, to please join me in the appreciation of these individuals. If there is a conflict between you or the University and Professor Rancourt, there must be a better way to resolve it than to fire him. Sure, he may be unconventional, but this is exactly what some of us seek and need in our university endeavor to stimulate us and feed our passions. If others don't appreciate this unconventionality, then it is as much their responsibility to tailor their university experience to their needs, and thus choose not to register in an unconventional class. What I ask is that the option remains an option. I am graduating in April, so these options that I had and want to stay are not for me. I profoundly wish for the University of Ottawa to allow the students of the future to

accomplish themselves in the ways of their choice. I believe that it is a unique and precious quality of the University that must be preserved. Firing Professor Rancourt would symbolize abolishing this freedom to choose our education, to fulfill ourselves to our liking; it would symbolize pulling support for creativity, critical thinking and uniqueness. It would symbolize that this University that I love and praise, is changing.

For prospective students, and to give us graduating students some peace of mind, please find a better way to resolve your conflicts, and keep Professor Rancourt active on the teaching staff.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Isabelle Soucy

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From: **Emily Coffey** <

Date: Jan 5, 2009 1:48 PM

Subject: Professor Denis Rancourt

To: allan.rock

Cc: claudc.cde

Dear President Allan Rock,

It is with disappointment that I learnt of Prof. Denis Rancourt's recent suspension and pending dismissal from the University of Ottawa. Disappointment may be an odd choice of terminology, considering I have never met or taken a class with professor Rancourt and have no personal interest in his career. My disappointment comes from recalling my own experiences at U of O. Despite achieving academic excellence on paper, I found myself feebly stimulated and continually frustrated by the poor pedagogy imposed by the administration's apparent need to standardize, control, and constrain all aspects of the learning process. Regrettably, I now consider large portions of my time at U of O wasted.

Lest this sound like an unfair overgeneralization, I provide a few short examples. I stopped attending several undergraduate courses altogether, as I found I could get an A+ by reading the textbook chapters before a test. This proved more efficient and interesting than the classes, which were textbook summaries. This was my first indication that my time at U of O would not constitute what I believe is a university education (I learned to read quite well in grade school). In a course entitled 'Child Development' I studied the mechanisms of learning over development, curves of retention, and best teaching methods. It was required that this material be committed to memory, in the form of a large numbers of facts and figures extracted from a textbook, the temporary retention of which was graded by multiple-choice examination. The absurdity of being forced to learn about learning in the (scientifically demonstrated) worse possible way forced me to raise the topic with professor, who recognized the problem but insisted on the need to conform to U of O grading and reporting requirements. During my studies, my father was hired in the English department as a part-time professor. He believed that a class entitled 'Essay Writing Workshop' and purporting to prepare undergraduates for communicating academically is not best accomplished in an auditorium setting with 60 students. His desperate attempt to improve the skills of his students by personally editing and providing feedback on several of their drafts was

repressed as it differed from other sections of the same course, with the following explanation from the Dean: "This is not a teaching university". Perhaps U of O should write this slogan on the website to avoid misrepresenting itself to prospective students.

It was only through contact with a very small group of inspiring U of O professors with teaching approaches similar to Prof. Rancourt's that I managed to subject myself to an entire undergraduate degree at U of O. In my current university, I am pleased that there is less focus on earning fractions of percentage points and more on preparing oneself to be an effective scientist. My professors have the freedom to create interesting and challenging learning environments as they see fit. To the few professors at U of O who did so anyway, I owe my career, and things I value much more – my inspiration and curiosity for my subject, and my ability to think critically.

I have focused on criticisms of Prof. Rancourt's use of unconventional pedagogy, as it is the aspect of his dismissal which most enrages me. My colleagues will undoubtedly share their thoughts on why it is inappropriate and harmful for a university administration to punish an employee for their political opinion and for questioning conventional beliefs. Those in positions of responsibility at the University of Ottawa have missed or forgotten something of the essence of what a university is, or should be. The University and society needs Prof. Rancourt and many more like him.

Emily Coffey

B.Sc. Psychology (Honours) – *Summa cum laude*, University of Ottawa
M.Sc. Brain and Cognitive Science (candidate), Universiteit van Amsterdam
Human Behaviour and Performance Specialist, European Space Agency

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From: **Joe Girard** <

Date: Jan 5, 2009 12:55 PM

Subject: Open Letter Regarding the Expulsion of Denis Rancourt

To: allan.rock

Cc: claudcde

Dear Mr. Rock,

I'm writing to chuck in my chips about the systematic, dispiriting, unimpressive, and shady expulsion of Professor Denis Rancourt. I first met Mr. Rancourt on even terms, as fellow men of academic proclivity, at a university-based film and discussion group. In our discussions, I was first struck by Mr. Rancourt's ability to command the respect and consideration of all present, despite the tendency of others to disagree with his views. Myself included. It was clear that Mr. Rancourt is a man of contention, with unique and well-considered beliefs, which I instantly recognized as shaped by his experience and his awareness of himself and others. Most people, to a large fault, make their decisions and conduct themselves based on outward appearances and what others will think. Having reviewed the professor's history, I can see that his personal conduct and philosophy, independent and highly esteemed if controversial, is working to the great benefit of the

school for which you are namely responsible. Should you choose to torpedo his efforts, it would be a self-aimed injury, Mr. Rock.

Leaving the film and discussion group for the first time I felt energized and inspired that my girlfriend, whom I support financially, attends an educational facility where such men as Mr. Rancourt can exist and flourish. It was an exciting and enthusing comment on the future of the 21st century university.

Know that I, in conjunction with thousands of others (and who knows how many tens of thousands of others, through word of mouth), will lose an unfathomable amount of respect for your institution, should you proceed on the grounds you tread presently. Your actions show that you're aware that the only way to get Mr. Rancourt's kind out of your system is to create an atmosphere that causes them to leave on their own, through bullying, implicit language, and suppression. It's going to be difficult for you at this point to convince those aware of your current actions that your interest is for conducting an institution that is transparent, fair, and of significant value. Ethical.

Not my girlfriend nor I desire ties with such an institution that would not uphold these most basic properties. I know it's in you to make the right decision on these matters. I know it's in you to maintain your integrity.

~Joe Girard

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From: **gdyke089** <

Date: Jan 5, 2009 5:47 AM

Subject: Denis Rancourt

To: alan.rock

Cc: claudc.cde

Denis Rancourt's Science in Society course provides a valuable outlet for many students, staff and community members who wish to organize and have productive debates, discussions, and plans for action. The course has not done any damage to the university as far as the students are concerned (who are, after all, the most important members of the institution). In fact, it is incredibly refreshing to have that course, after the laborious and, often, boring classes that so many other professors offer (they could perhaps learn something from it).

Firing Professor Rancourt will simply demonstrate that the University of Ottawa is an institution that does not openly accept change and diversity, which is certainly not the view we would want to have in this day and age. Allow him to stay and continue his valued work, and think of the students for once.

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From: **Sylvain Rigaud** <

Date: Jan 5, 2009 5:03 AM

Subject: Suspension and dismissal of Professor Denis Rancourt

To: allan.rock

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Hello Mr. Allan Rock,

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My name is Sylvain Rigaud and I am nowadays a PhD student in France. I spent one year in Canada in 2005-2006 and I studied at the university of Ottawa. During this year, I had the opportunity to meet the Professor Denis Rancourt, not during one of its courses, but during the numerous events he organized (especially during cinema politica series, activism festival,...). The human exchanges I had with Mr Rancourt, but also with every students I met during these events was one of the most interesting things I lived at the University of Ottawa.

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I write you today because I learnt that you plan to fire Mr Rancourt and I am really disappointed to imagine that future students can not be live this experience...

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sadly,

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Sylvain Rigaud

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From: **caro wall** <

Date: Jan 5, 2009 1:23 AM

Subject: disapproval of the university's plans to fire Denis

To: allan.rock

Cc: claudc.cde

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Hello, my name is Carolyn Wall and I am a student at the University of Ottawa. I have met Denis Rancourt on a couple of occasions and believe that, if anything, this man should be moving up the university's hierarchal scale. I met him during one of his organised Cinema Politica events and found that he was a very unique teacher who is caring, personal and actually CARES about the people's education. I protest the university's plan to fire Professor Rancourt and hope to see that the Board of Governors hold a public meeting on the question. These days it is very hard to find people who are true to themselves and to their values, who think outside of the box and are innovative and productive; Professor Rancourt is one of these rare people and is a great inspiration to many university students. It would be a great disappointment to see him get fired.

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Thank you for your time,
Carolyn Wall

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From: **sthom080** <>

Date: Jan 5, 2009 12:11 AM

Subject:

To: allan.rock

Cc: claudcde

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President Allan Rock,

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I am writing to express my disapproval of the university's plans to fire Denis Rancourt. In firing Professor Rancourt you are dogmatically opposing academic freedom. As part of the University of Ottawa Alumni, I request that the Board of Governors hold a public meeting on the question. I feel it is essential that the University of Ottawa show support for pedagogical freedom for professors instead of the standardization of teaching.

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Thank you for time,

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Stephanie Thomas
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From: **Michel Pilloud** <>

Date: Jan 4, 2009 7:52 PM

Subject: Suspension et renvoi du professeur Denis Rancourt

To: allan.rock

Cc: claudcde , dgr , pillmic@yahoo.ca

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Bonjour Monsieur Rock,

.....
Je connais le professeur Rancourt et je pense qu'il se porte à la défense de la raison et de la vérité.

Ce n'est pas une position confortable, mais je crois qu'elle doit être respectée si nous voulons garder notre société de droit.

Je crois qu'il est important d'entendre des voix de personnes qui ne pensent pas qu'à leurs propres intérêts à court terme comme cela se passe trop souvent actuellement dans nos gouvernements et dans nos institutions.

Vive la liberté de parole et vive la liberté de penser différemment.

En tant que citoyen je m'oppose à toutes les tentatives de baillonner les gens qui ne pensent pas comme les gens en autorité.

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Michel Pilloud
Gatineau
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From: **W.J.Baltutis** <
Date: Jan 4, 2009 6:18 PM
Subject: Suspension of Professor Rancourt
To: allan.rock
Cc: claudcde

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Dear Mr. Rock
I am greatly disturbed to hear of the University of Ottawa's plan to fire Denis Rancourt. Throughout my years at the University of Ottawa Professor Rancourt's 'activism class' and his Cinema Politic provided a very formative and influential opportunity for looking at political issues not covered in my other courses. Professor Rancourt's course and the Friday night movie series is an extremely unique part of the University of Ottawa's community, and a unique chance for community members to meet and have open discussions. To do away with Professor Rancourt's activism course, his Friday night cinema politic, and a committed member of the University of Ottawa teaching staff would be extremely unfortunate. I urge the university to reconsider their decision to fire Professor Rancourt and to listen to those who have benefited from Professor Rancourt's contribution to the University of Ottawa.

Jesse Baltutis, MSc
London School of Economics
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From: **Eve Wilensky** <
Date: Jan 4, 2009 5:56 PM
Subject: regarding Professor Rancourt
To: allan.rock
Cc: claudcde , Denis Rancourt

Dear President Rock,

Denis Rancourt has had a tremendous impact on me. In my 6 years in university I have rarely been as affected by a professor as I was by Denis.
Denis was the closing keynote speaker at the Student's for a Democratic Society's Conference last year at the University of British Columbia, which I helped organize.
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Professor Rancourt inspired me to seek more from my degree and to become an active member of the community not only on campus but within the city at large.

Professor Rancourt wants students to learn! He doesn't want to contribute to the rat race and merely add another automaton to the machine. He wants students to realize how much power they hold within themselves and to get excited about it!

I remember him speaking about how he asked one of his classes why the sky was blue and when no one could answer him, he spent the rest of the class just trying to figure out that one question. Denis wants education to be applicable to our real lives—enough abstraction and critical analysis that's divorced from reality! He wants to send his students out into the world with practical knowledge and a sense of hope. He respects his students as equals and teaches with love, compassion and excitement. These are all surprisingly rare qualities to find in a professor. As we all know, professors are not trained how to teach others, in fact, most are hired due to how much and where they have been published.

In his closing speech at the conference, Professor Rancourt asked, "how do you wake up?" In order to create change in the world, he argued, we have to first wake up and see the world as it is. But really--how do you get jolted?

Professor Rancourt jolted me. He shook me with his words and woke me up. I now know that I have to move beyond my education and start putting words into action. I do not want to hide behind my mac book writing about atrocities or social injustice, I want to get in there and actually do something. This is something that university does not teach you. It teaches you how to think critically, how to analyze, how to research—but leaves you with no practical way in which to actively participate in the community. Education does not lead to action, so Professor Rancourt says.

I understand why Denis has come under attack from the university. The university is a big corporation with very set guidelines and goals. Rancourt is rocking the boat and is consequently being punished for it.

I must say that if the University of Ottawa, or Canada for that matter, is to live up to its reputation of democracy, freedom of speech, respect for others, and forward thinking, than to fire Professor Rancourt is surely a step backwards. On your own website you exclaim, "The world expects a lot from Canada and its institutions, and so do we," so please, do not disappoint- let's show the world that we are at the forefront of progress and liberal, open-minded education.

Sincerely,

Eve Belle Wilensky

4th year sociology honours student, University of British Columbia

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From: **James Douglas** <

Date: Jan 4, 2009 5:36 PM

Subject: Planned dismissal of Denis Rancourt

To: allan.rock

Cc: claudc.cde

Dear Allan Rock,

I am writing you this letter to try to encourage you to respect Professor Rancourt's tenure, and to use your power to prevent his dismissal.

Last year when I lived in Ottawa, I attended to a number of movie screenings that the professor has hosted, and I always had an interesting time. I think it is very good that students on campus can learn from someone who does things differently. It is important that we learn about things outside of our narrow academic field.

Although you may not agree with some of Dr. Rancourt's political ideas, I urge you to respect this difference. University of Ottawa will be better for it. People cannot have any deep respect for a university that dismisses professors based on their political ideology. How can a university function well with an atmosphere like that?

Sincerely,
James Douglas
Queen's University

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From: **Aileen Duncan** <

Date: Jan 4, 2009 4:43 PM

Subject: Denis Rancourt

To: allan.rock

Cc: claudc.cde

I have known Denis Rancourt for about two years, due to the fact our radio shows on CHUO FM were after each other. During this time I have gotten to know him, and have always perceived him as a brilliant individual. I think his ways of teaching are innovative, and he greatly contributes to the positive mood of CHUO. He is a source of inspiration for me and my co-hosts. Therefore, I find it greatly disturbing that he is suspended, to be fired.

I am in grade 12, and I was planning to apply to the University of Ottawa this year. However, this is giving me second thoughts. I'm not sure I would like to go to a school where good teachers are treated unfairly. A teacher's political leanings should not be a factor in his treatment by university administration.

Sincerely,
~Aileen Duncan

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Subject: Suspension of Professor Denis Rancourt

From: "Aplin Nick" <>

Date: Sun, 4 January, 2009 11:06 pm

To: allan.rock

Dear Mr. Rock

The news of the suspension hit me like a rock.

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Having been a part time teacher at U of O in the 70s and 80s, and having got to know about Professor Denis Rancourt and his reputation as an outstanding physics teacher at U of O in the past few years, I find myself questioning why this might have happened. Unless something of real consequence has been concealed from the public about transgressions by Professor Denis Rancourt, the suspension is without merit and can only bring U of O into significant disrepute.

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Please act to stop this suspension. Please inform me of the reasons for this apparent travesty of procedure.

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Sincerely,

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E. Nicholas Aplin, P. Eng. (retired)

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Former teacher of 'Engineering with Wood' - an elective course for 4th year Civil Engineering students, between ~1975 and ~1990